



Mayor Mark Mitchell
State of the Neighborhoods Address

April 18, 2015
As Prepared for Delivery

I want to thank all of you for coming today! Last year was the first time a Mayor gave a State of the Neighborhoods speech in the City of Tempe. It was a new idea. I wanted to have a chance to speak with residents about the most important component of our city, our neighborhoods. I'm happy this has become a tradition!

Something special is happening in our city. Despite being less than 10 years removed from the start of one the largest recessions in American history, our city is coming back strong. Tempe is leading Arizona out of the doom and gloom of dire economic forecasts and into a bright future of job growth and an improving quality of life.

The proof of this change is all around us.

A nice jog or bike ride along the shores of beautiful Tempe Town Lake will not only reveal brand new beautiful buildings being built by construction workers, which will soon be filled with people working high-wage quality jobs, by the way. The jog will also show you the large number of people in our community who love spending time outdoors, love visiting the stunning Tempe Center for the Arts, pursuing a healthy lifestyle, or soaking up the beauty of our unique and evolving skyline.

While there is always opportunity for growth, I am happy to report that the state of our neighborhoods and our community is strong.

When I look back at my childhood; there are people who have made all the difference. First, I always think of my parents.

My father, who is a lifelong Tempean, went to school here, graduated from college here, taught at Tempe High, and became Mayor and even represented us in Congress. My mother stood beside him the entire time, but she also pursued her own path, teaching high school for over 35 years, volunteering her time to make a difference, and running our family.

There were also teachers, all of who dedicated their time to my education, countless baseball and football coaches, and friends who helped shape me into the person I am today.

In all of my memories, there is another central figure. And that is Tempe. I love this place, and what it has given me. As a father, I can only hope that my girls will look back at their childhood here and feel the same way that I do.

Every year, tens of thousands of people arrive in Tempe for the first time. Many of them are ASU students working hard to improve their lives through education. Many of them have picked our city as a place to raise their children.

And of course, many of them are tourists, here to visit us for one of the large events we host like the PF Chang's Rock n' Roll Marathon, the Ironman or the Mill Avenue Art Festival. You might not know it, but the City of Tempe hosts more than 200 festivals, athletic events and concerts a year. That equates to nearly 800,000 people visiting us. So it is very important to all of us that our city remains a welcoming place.

That is why I love to brag about our city ... because as we grow I want people to know that we are keeping that small town feel. In fact that community is what drives us, and as Mayor it is important to me that we work to maintain this.

My conversation with you today is all about communicating how the city is working to provide a high quality of life while being a responsible steward of your tax dollars that you entrust us with, while getting feedback from you all along the way.

One thing that I love about this community is that inclusion has long been a core value in Tempe. Lately, you've likely seen or experienced discussions surrounding 'religious freedom' acts, like the one in Indiana. And you saw that as soon as the Governor signed the bill, businesses began cancelling plans to relocate to the state, and tourists cancelled vacation plans.

Tempe has taken the opposite stance on these types of issues, taking steps to put the values of inclusiveness and non-discrimination directly into our city's governing documents. After the Tempe City Council unanimously passed an ordinance in 2014 that outlawed discrimination of all kinds, including due to sexual orientation and gender identity, nearly 70% of Tempe voters cemented those rules into our Charter on Election Day last August.

And, businesses have taken notice.

This isn't empty rhetoric; the numbers support the benefits of our inclusive policies. Northern Trust, State Farm, GoDaddy, and Shutterfly have all recently announced expansions into Tempe. These expansions will amount to more than 11,000 jobs and \$772 million dollars in capital investment. Each of these businesses explicitly stated that our inclusionary practices were an important reason they chose Tempe.

And you know why else companies like Northern Trust and State Farm are looking at Tempe? It's the investment that we have made in our community. They see a community of residents that love the city in which they live.

You may not know this but every year, the city contacts residents as part of our Community Satisfaction Survey and asks them how the city is doing-- from the quality of our library services, to trash collection to transit service.

I'm proud to report that according to our 2014 survey results, 90% of our residents are either satisfied or highly satisfied with the overall quality of services in Tempe. 85% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the quality of life in our community.

Right now, you're probably saying to yourself— Well, sure, but how do we match up to other cities? Well.... I'll tell you!

Tempe ranked above the national average in 34 of 40 measured areas and the overall satisfaction that our residents feel is 34% above the national average. We are continuing to set the standard for other cities around the U.S. And I think it is THE major reason that we are seeing such economic interest in our community.

When I took office in July of 2012, our economy was in a very tough place. Families were struggling; businesses were uncertain of their futures and were laying people off or delaying plans to bring on new people. As a result Tempe had some tough choices.

What a difference a few years makes.

Since I have taken office, we have announced the addition of 15,000 new jobs, 4.7 million square feet of the highest quality office space there is, and we just crossed \$1 billion dollars in capital investment. And at 97%, we have the highest occupancy rates for Class A Office space in the region.

And it's not just downtown that is growing. Our efforts to attract new high quality businesses are paying off in South Tempe, where a rezoned and redeveloped Discovery Business Park is attracting tenants like Northern Trust and Shutterfly.

The ASU Research Park is about to celebrate the grand opening of Amkor, a semiconductor company that recently decided to relocate to Tempe. It's pretty clear, the Technology Corridor along the 101 is not only alive and well, it's growing at an amazing rate. And all of these economic successes add up to one thing for our residents. A better quality of life.

South Tempe is seeing its first development of single family homes in nearly a decade. It's over 50 acres and will provide housing for 94 families. That's 94 new families contributing to our economy, dining in our restaurants, signing up to attend our local schools.

In the end, responsible development means that you as residents will see more of the types of businesses you want. It helps the city to see a more stable revenue tax stream, and when companies and their employees choose Tempe, it means more tax dollars that we can use to improve your quality of life and offer the services and amenities that you want and need.

I love being Mayor. I get to help improve my community on a daily basis. But with that being said, and you may have heard me say this before, most of the time, local government isn't sexy and it isn't glamorous. It's about providing the services that you as our residents rely on.

Things like making sure your water is clean, your trash is picked up, that the buildings and homes built in this community are safe. These are the kind of things that we, as a Council, worry about for our residents. They're the building blocks of our community.

And with this year's Capital Improvement Program Budget, we are taking the steps to add to these building blocks. The draft budget will go to a final vote of the Council in June.

And while we're not out of the woods yet economically, but we are in the position to start investing in the projects that you are most interested in.

We've heard from you, and we know that the first priority on that list is our neighborhood parks.

When I was a kid, the neighborhood park was THE gathering place for all my friends and neighbors. I played little league there, rode my bike, goofed off with my friends... That's the great thing about Tempe-- we have a neighborhood park every square mile in the city. But that's also a challenge-- keeping up with maintaining and improving our parks, especially in the case of an economic downturn.

Maintaining and investing in our parks is an expensive prospect. The playground equipment has to be safe for our children to play on, and of course, it's important that everyone, regardless of ability, is able to use our park system.

And that's why we have been focusing on how we can reinvent our parks to recapture the idea that they are places for neighborhoods to enjoy and gather.

I'm proud to say that this year's CIP budget includes a \$25 million dollar investment into our park system over the next 5 years. In addition to this funding, the City Council approved the use of monies that we have received from land sales and lease payments. This could be another \$3 to \$6 million that we are able to invest because of development.

This funding will be used to improve the experience at our ball fields and sport courts, replace and renovate restrooms and ramadas throughout the city, and dedicate \$5 million dollars for playground equipment for our kids.

In 2014 alone, nearly 2,500 young people participated in the city's sports programs. They are thriving. And we need to make sure that they are playing on safe fields. That's why we're going to be replacing and repairing the park elements that are in the worst condition first.

This isn't all of the funding that we need to completely revamp our parks, but it's a good start. And it's more than we've been able to invest since the recession started.

Another area where the city is focusing investment is on street maintenance. I'm happy to announce that over the next 5 years, the proposed CIP will put over \$28 million dollars into improving the quality of our roads.

Unfortunately, over the last 11 years, the State Legislature has diverted over \$7.5 million dollars of Highway User Revenue Funds meant for Tempe. That funding would have paid to repair and resurface major and minor streets throughout our community. With these millions of dollars swept from our budget, it has become increasingly difficult to keep up with our strategic plan, which I think we've all noticed at one time or another. The Legislature swept these funds again this year, so next year we're going to have to fight to keep them.

And I guarantee you that I'll again be leading the fight to get the dollars that we deserve, and when we do, we can finally supplement the millions of dollars that we are already investing.

Beyond making our streets safe for automobiles, we want our streets to be safe for pedestrians and bikes. We're doing this by improving our pathway system. You might not know this, but Tempe has about 150 miles of bike lanes and 23 miles of multi-use pathways. The projects proposed in this year's CIP will add to and better connect the network of existing pathways to each other.

These improvements will be especially beneficial to the cyclists in our community. We pride ourselves as being a bicycle friendly city. And to become even more bike friendly, Tempe uses the proven methods for integrating bicycling and bicycle infrastructure into all levels of city planning.

That's why we're looking to invest money into bicycle boulevards that will help protect and buffer bike lanes. We're also investing in streetscape projects like the one along Broadway Road, which will improve the experience not only for the residents facing the street, but also for pedestrians and bike riders.

For our first responders, we're using this opportunity to get them some of the equipment and the assets that they need. This includes body cameras for our Tempe Police Department. The Council is investing over a half a million dollars to ensure the police department's ability to safely, security and efficiently collect and store evidence. This will help to transform the way the Tempe Police Department does business.

We're also planning to obtain a Certificate of Necessity from the state, which will allow our Tempe Fire Medical Rescue Department to create its own ambulance service if that makes the best financial sense in the future. This will allow Tempe Fire Medical Rescue to legally transport patients to the hospital and obtain reimbursements to offset costs. It's win-win for our community.

The city's goal is to provide the best service for our residents as possible. And that's exactly what this funding will allow our city staff to do.

It's amazing what our staff can do with the resources available to them. Just a few years ago, the Council cut \$30 million dollars out of the city's operating budget. Though we are on the upswing, those cuts still have not been restored. But you wouldn't know that by looking at the dedication of our employees to this city.

Just take a look at our library. During the recession, the hours and the budget for books and programming was cut. Still our library is doing a remarkable job of serving our residents and the thousands of folks who go there from all around Maricopa County.

While many libraries in the country are seeing a decline in attendance, our numbers are increasing. More than 25,000 people attended a library program this year. That is an increase of more than 25%. At our library, seniors learned computer skills, teenagers gathered tips on getting into college through College Connect, and thousands of children went to story time. Our staff programmed the library with the intent of keeping our residents connected, and that's exactly what happened.

During the downturn, the Tempe Municipal Court suffered cuts, but our staff, worked even harder to help the public. The creation of a Mental Health Court

helped to provide seriously mentally ill offenders access to treatment instead of jail time.

In 2013, the Mental Health Court served 134 struggling individuals and helped to coordinate services between the court, criminal justice system, and treatment providers.

Along these same lines, in July 2014, the Tempe Municipal Court established the first Veterans' Court in the East Valley. Veterans' Court is a cooperative effort among parties in the criminal justice system, social service agencies, members of the Veterans Health Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs Justice Outreach program and Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care, who are all working together to assist Arizona veterans transitioning out of military service. Since its inception, it has served 123 veterans and the court will celebrate the first graduates of the program.

Another area hit hard was the arts. Well, I have to say, not only is the city working on turning up our arts program, but our residents are pitching in too! With your help, the City is in the process of completing an Arts and Culture Master Plan for Tempe. This study will help us determine future paths for Tempe Center for the Arts, our public art program and other aspects of art in our city.

I have to say, I was amazed at the high level of community involvement. Hundreds of people turned out for focus groups and a Town Hall and filled out online surveys. As a result we can be assured that our Master Plan will reflect the will of our residents and ensure that the arts remain a strong part of our vibrant community.

Lastly, I'd also like to announce that I've been working to restore a community outreach event used by previous mayors to inform residents on different topics of interest. Until 2010, the city hosted a monthly event called the Let's Talk Tempe. Unfortunately, in the downturn, this program was eliminated. I'd like to revive this concept. It would be slated to take place three times a year as a starting point.

As before, it would air on Tempe 11 and the public would be invited. A guest or guests would be interviewed and the audience would be invited to ask questions. The first of these could happen in June. We'll keep you posted.

I could go on and on about all of the great things happening in the City of Tempe. But luckily for you, I'm going to stop now and let you get on with this great morning.

I hope you have enjoyed hearing about how we as a Council are trying our best to serve you and your neighbors.

If you have any questions, I'll be around after the awards for a bit to chat and you can always call or email my office at any time.